

SUMMARY OF THE MILITARY RETIREMENT SYSTEM

As of September 30, 1999

Description of the Reporting Entity

The reporting entity is the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, one of whose missions is to oversee the accounting, investing, and reporting of the Military Retirement Fund (the Fund). In FY 1999, the Fund paid out approximately \$32 billion in benefits to military retirees and survivors. In addition to staff members of the reporting entity and the DoD Office of the Actuary, hundreds of individuals at the DFAS Cleveland and Denver Pay Centers are involved in making the benefit payments. The Fund receives income from three sources: monthly normal cost payments from the Services to pay for the current year's service cost, annual payments from Treasury to amortize the unfunded liability, and investment income. During FY 1999, the Fund received \$10 billion in normal cost payments, a \$15 billion unfunded liability amortization payment, and \$14 billion in investment income. No fund accounts have been excluded by this statement. Because the Fund provides a service and not a product, administrative costs are not ascertainable, and are therefore not calculated or reported.

Summary

The military retirement system applies to members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force. However, most of the provisions also apply to retirement systems for members of the Coast Guard (administered by the Department of Transportation), officers of the Public Health Service (administered by the Department of Health and Human Services), and officers of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (administered by the Department of Commerce). Only those members in plans administered by the Department of Defense are included in this valuation.

The system is a funded, noncontributory defined benefit plan that includes nondisability retired pay, disability retired pay, retired pay for reserve service, and survivor annuity programs. The Service Secretaries approve immediate nondisability retired pay at any age with credit of at least 20 years of active-duty service. Reserve retirees must be 60 years old with 20 creditable years of service before retired pay commences. There is no vesting before retirement.

There are three distinct nondisability benefit formulas related to three populations within the military retirement system. *Final pay*: Military personnel who first became members of the armed services before September 8, 1980 have retired pay equal to (terminal basic pay) times (a multiplier). The multiplier is equal to (2.5 percent) times (years of service) and is limited to 75 percent. *High-3*: If the retiree first became a member of the armed services on or after September 8, 1980, the average of the highest 36 months of basic pay is used instead of terminal basic pay. *Redux*: Members first entering the armed services on or after August 1, 1986 are subject to a penalty if they retire with less than 30 years

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of service; at age 62, their retired pay is recomputed without the penalty. The FY 2000 Defense Authorization Act provided that Redux members now have a choice of (a) receiving High-3 benefits or (b) staying under the Redux formula and receiving a lump-sum \$30,000 payment. Members make their election during the fifteenth year of service. Those who choose the lump-sum payment must remain continuously on active duty until they complete 20 years of active duty service or forfeit a portion of the \$30,000.

Retiree and survivor benefits are automatically adjusted annually to protect the purchasing power of initial retired pay. The benefits associated with members first entering the armed services before August 1, 1986 are adjusted annually by the percentage increase in the average Consumer Price Index (CPI). This is commonly referred to as full CPI protection. Benefits associated with members entering on or after August 1, 1986 who elect the \$30,000 payment are annually increased by the percentage change in the CPI minus 1 percent. At the military member's age 62, the benefits are restored to the amount that would have been payable had full CPI protection been in effect. This restoral is in combination with that described in the previous paragraph. However, after this restoral, partial indexing (CPI minus 1 percent) continues for life.

Nondisability Retirement From Active Service

The current system allows voluntary retirement upon completion of at least 20 years of service at any age, subject to Service Secretary approval. The military retiree receives immediate retired pay calculated as (base pay) times (a multiplier). Base pay is equal to terminal basic pay if the retiree first became a member of the armed services before September 8, 1980. It is equal to the average of the highest 36 months of basic pay for all other members. The multiplier is equal to (2.5 percent) times (years of service, rounded down to the nearest month) and is limited to 75 percent. Members first entering the armed services on or after August 1, 1986, who elect the \$30,000 and who retire with less than 30 years of service receive a temporary penalty until age 62. The penalty reduces the multiplier by one percentage point for each full year of service under 30. For example, the multiplier for a 20-year retiree would be 40 percent (50 percent minus 10 percent). At age 62, the retired pay is recomputed with the penalty removed.

In FY 1999, 1.35 million nondisability retirees from active duty were paid \$26.4 billion.

Disability Retirement

A disabled military member is entitled to disability retired pay if the disability is at least 30 percent (under a standard schedule of rating disabilities by the Veterans Administration) and either (1) the member has eight years of service; (2) the disability results from active duty; or (3) the disability occurred in the line of duty during a time of war or national emergency or certain other time periods.

In disability retirement, the member receives retired pay equal to the larger of (1) the accrued nondisability retirement benefit, or (2) base pay multiplied by the rated percent of disability. The benefit cannot be more than 75 percent of base pay. Only the excess of (1) over (2) is subject to federal income taxes. Base pay is equal to terminal basic pay if the retiree first became a member of the armed services before September 8, 1980. If the retiree first entered the Services on or after September 8, 1980, base pay is equal to the average of the highest 36 months of basic pay.

Members whose disabilities may not be permanent are placed on a temporary-disability retired list and receive disability retirement pay just as if they were permanently disabled. However, they must be physically examined every 18 months for any change in disability. A final determination must be made within five years. The temporary disability pay is calculated like the permanent disability retired pay, except that it can be no less than 50 percent of base pay.

In FY 1999, 107,000 disability retirees were paid \$1.37 billion.

Reserve Retirement

Members of the reserves may retire after 20 years of creditable service, the last eight of which must be in a reserve component. However, reserve retired pay is not payable until age 60. Retired pay is computed as (base pay) times (2.5 percent) times (years of service). If the reservist was first a member of the armed services before September 8, 1980, base pay is defined as the active duty basic pay in effect for the retiree's grade and years of service at the time that retired pay begins. If the reservist first became a member of the armed services on or after September 8, 1980, base pay is the average basic pay for the member's grade in the highest 36 months that he/she was a member of the armed services. The years of service are determined by using a point system, where 360 points convert to a year of service. Typically, a point is awarded for a day of service or drill attendance, with 15 automatic points being awarded for a year's membership in a reserve component. A creditable year of service is one in which the member earned at least 50 points. A member cannot retire with less than 20 creditable years, although points earned in non-creditable years are used in the retirement calculation.

In FY 1999, 233,000 reserve retirees were paid \$2.39 billion.

Survivor Benefits

Legislation originating in 1953 provided optional survivor benefits. It was later referred to as the Retired Servicemen's Family Protection Plan (RSFPP). The plan proved to be expensive and inadequate since the survivor annuities were never adjusted for inflation and could not be more than 50 percent of retired pay. RSFPP was designed to be self-supporting in the sense that the present value of the reductions to retired pay equaled the present value of the survivor annuities.

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On September 21, 1972, RSFPP was replaced by the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) for new retirees. RSFPP still covers those servicemen retired before 1972 who did not convert to the new plan and still pays survivor annuities.

Retired pay is reduced, before taxes, for the member's cost of SBP. Total SBP costs are shared by the Government and the retiree, so the reductions in retired pay are only a portion of the total cost of the SBP program.

The SBP survivor annuity is initially 55 percent of the member's base amount. The base amount is elected by the member, but cannot be less than \$300 or more than the member's full retired pay. If a penalty for service under 30 years is included in the calculation of retired pay, the maximum base amount is equal to the full retired pay without the penalty.

The spouse's annuity is considered a two-tier benefit because, at age 62, the annuity is reduced to 35 percent of the base amount. Prior to the enactment of the two-tier benefit, survivor annuities were integrated with Social Security. SBP participants and active and reserve personnel with at least 20 years of service on October 1, 1985 were grandfathered into the two-tier system. Their survivors will be given the higher of the two annuities at age 62.

During FY 1987 the SBP program's treatment of survivor remarriages changed. Prior to the change, a surviving spouse remarrying before age 60 had the survivor annuity suspended. The change lowered the age to 55. (If the remarriage ends in divorce or death, the annuity is reinstated.)

Beginning in April 1992, retirees with base amounts equal to full retired pay could also elect a supplemental annuity for their surviving spouses after age 62, in increments of 5 percent of the base amount, up to a maximum 20 percent benefit. (The cost of this supplemental SBP benefit is borne by retirees in the form of a reduction in retired pay over and above the usual 6.5 percent reduction for SBP.)

Members who die on active duty with over 20 years of service are assumed to have retired on the day they died and to have elected full SBP coverage for spouses and/or children.

SBP annuities are reduced by any VA survivor benefits and all premiums relating to the reductions are returned to the survivor. Additionally, SBP annuities are annually increased with cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). These COLAs may be based on full or partial CPI increases, depending on the benefit formula covering the member. If the member dies before age 62 and the survivor is subject to partial COLAs, the survivor's annuity is increased (on the member's 62nd birthday) to the amount that would have been payable had full COLAs been in effect. Partial COLAs continue annually thereafter.

For reserve retirees, the same set of retired pay reductions applies for survivor coverage after a reservist turns 60 and begins to receive retired pay. A second set of optional reductions, under the Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan, provides annuities to survivors of reservists who die before

age 60, but after attaining 20 years of service. The added cost of this coverage is borne completely by reservists through deductions from retired pay and survivor annuities.

In FY 1999, 243,000 surviving families were paid \$1.77 billion.

Temporary Early Retirement Authority (TERA)

The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1993 (P.L. 102-484) grants temporary authority for the military services to offer early retirements to members with more than 15 but less than 20 years of service. The retired pay is calculated in the usual way except that there is a reduction of 1 percent for every year below 20 years of service. Part or all of this reduction can be restored at age 62 if the retired member works in a qualified public service job during the period from the date of retirement to the date on which the retiree would have completed 20 years of service. Unlike members who leave military service before 20 years with voluntary separation incentives or special separation benefits, these early retirees are treated like regular military retirees for the purposes of other retirement fringe benefits. This authority is scheduled to expire at the end of FY 2001.

As of September 30, 1999, there were 53,000 TERA retirees receiving retired pay at an annual rate of \$637 million.

Cost-of-Living Increases

All nondisability retirement, disability retirement, and most survivor annuities are adjusted annually for inflation. Cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) are automatically scheduled to occur every 12 months, on December 1st, to be reflected in checks issued at the beginning of January.

The “full” COLA effective December 1 is computed by calculating the percentage increase in the CPI from the third quarter of the prior calendar year to the third quarter of the current calendar year. The increase is based on the Urban Wage Earner and Clerical Worker Consumer Price Index (CPI-W) and is rounded to the nearest tenth of one percent.

The benefits of retirees (and their survivors) are increased annually with the full COLA, except for those first entering the armed services on or after August 1, 1986 electing the \$30,000. Their benefits are annually increased with a partial COLA equal to the full COLA minus 1 percent. A one-time restoral is given to a partial COLA recipient on the first day of the month after the retiree’s 62nd birthday. At this time, retired pay (or the survivor benefit if the retiree is deceased) is increased to the amount that would have been payable had full COLAs been in effect. Annual partial COLAs continue after this restoral.

Relationship with VA Benefits

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides compensation for Service-connected and certain non-Service-connected disabilities. These VA benefits can be in place of (or in combination with) DoD retired pay, but they are not additive. Since VA benefits are exempt from federal income taxes, it is sometimes to the advantage of a member to elect them.

Veterans Administration benefits also overlap survivor benefits through the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program. DIC is payable to survivors of veterans who die from Service-connected causes. Although an SBP annuity must be reduced by the amount of any DIC benefit, all SBP premiums relating to the reduction in benefit are returned to the survivor.

Interrelationship with Other Federal Service

For retirement purposes, no credit is given for other federal service, except where cross-service transferability is allowed. Military service is generally creditable toward the federal civilian retirement systems if military retired pay is waived. However, a deposit (equal to a percentage of post-1956 basic pay) must be made to the Civil Service Retirement Fund in order to receive credit. Military service is not generally creditable under both systems (but is for reservists and certain disability retirees). Retired regular officers employed by the federal government lose a substantial portion of their retired pay while so employed, and all retired members are subject to a combined ceiling equivalent to Level V of the Executive Schedule. The ceiling does not apply to those who retired before October 13, 1978 (or were under age 60 and eligible for Reserve retirement on that date) and were continuously employed by the federal government since that date. The FY 2000 Defense Authorization Act repealed the reductions in military retired pay for military retirees employed by the federal government effective October 1, 1999.

Relationship of Retired Pay to Military Compensation

Basic pay is the only element of military compensation upon which retired pay is computed and entitlement is determined. Basic pay is the principal element of military compensation that all members receive, but it is not representative, for comparative purposes, of salary levels in the public and private sectors. Reasonable comparisons can be made to regular military compensation (RMC). RMC is the sum of (1) basic pay, (2) cash or in kind allowances (the housing allowance, which varies by grade, location, and dependency status, and a subsistence allowance) and (3) the tax advantages accruing to allowances because they are not subject to federal income tax. Basic pay represents approximately 73 percent of RMC for all retirement eligibles. For the 20-year retiree, basic pay is approximately 69 percent of RMC. Consequently, a 20-year retiree may be entitled to 50 percent of basic pay, but only 35 percent of RMC. For a 30-year retiree, the corresponding entitlements are 75 percent of basic pay, but only 59 percent of RMC. These relationships should be considered when military retired pay is compared to compensation under other retirement systems.

Social Security Benefits

Many military members and their families receive monthly benefits indexed to the CPI from Social Security. As full participants in the Social Security system, military personnel are in general entitled to the same benefits and are subject to the same eligibility criteria and rules as other employees. Details concerning the benefits are covered in other publications.

Beginning in 1946, Congress enacted a series of amendments to the Social Security Act that extended some benefits to military personnel and their survivors. These “gratuitous” benefits were reimbursed out of the general fund of the U.S. Treasury. The Servicemen’s and Veterans’ Survivor Benefits Act brought members of the military into the contributory Social Security system effective January 1, 1957.

For the Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program, military members must contribute the employee portion of the OASDI payroll tax, with the federal government contributing the matching employer contribution. Only the basic pay of a military member constitutes wages for social security purposes. One feature of OASDI unique to military personnel grants a noncontributory wage credit of (i) \$300 for each quarter between 1956 and 1978 in which such personnel received military wages and (ii) up to \$1,200 per year after 1977 (\$100 of credit for each \$300 of wages up to a maximum credit of \$1,200). The purpose of this credit is to take into account elements of compensation such as quarters and subsistence not included in wages for social security benefit calculation purposes. Under the 1983 Social Security amendments, the cost of the additional benefits resulting from the noncontributory wage credits for past service was met by a lump sum payment from general revenues, while the cost for future service will be met by payment of combined employer-employee tax on such credits as the service occurs.

Members of the military are also required to pay the Hospital Insurance (HI) payroll tax, with the federal government contributing the matching employer contribution. Medicare eligibility occurs at age 65, or earlier if the employee is disabled. Entitlement to Medicare usually terminates entitlement to benefits under TRICARE, DoD’s three-option managed health care program for the military, although eligibility continues for medical care in military facilities on a space available basis.

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Performance Measures

During FY 1999, the Fund made disbursements to approximately two million retirees and annuitants. All checks are sent out on a monthly basis.

While there are many ways to measure the funding progress of a pension plan, the ratio of assets in the fund to the present value of future benefits for annuitants on the roll is commonly used. Here is what this ratio has been for the last fourteen years:

- a. September 30, 1999 = .35142
- b. September 30, 1998 = .34567
- c. September 30, 1997 = .32200
- d. September 30, 1996 = .31314
- e. September 30, 1995 = .30375
- f. September 30, 1994 = .30306
- g. September 30, 1993 = .28314
- h. September 30, 1992 = .27018
- i. September 30, 1991 = .25127
- j. September 30, 1990 = .21878
- k. September 30, 1989 = .19549
- l. September 30, 1988 = .16211
- m. September 30, 1987 = .11431
- n. September 30, 1986 = .07187

This demonstrates a consistent improvement in the strength of the Fund over time. This trend is expected to continue in future years.

The weighted average yield of the Fund on September 30, 1999 was 8.0%.

Core Performance Measures

No operating costs are calculated for the Fund.

Limitations of the Financial Statements

These financial statements have been prepared to report the financial position and results of operations for the Military Retirement Fund pursuant to the requirements of the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. While the statements have been prepared from the books and records of the Military Retirement Fund in accordance with the formats prescribed by the Office of Management and Budget, the statements are different from the financial statements used to monitor and control budgetary resources that are prepared from the same books and records. These statements should be read with the

realization that they are for a federal entity, that unfunded liabilities reported in the financial statements can not be liquidated without the enactment of an appropriation, and that the payment of all liabilities other than for contracts can be abrogated by DoD.

Comparative Financial Data

To comply with DoD Financial Management Regulation Volume 6B, "Form and Content of the Department of Defense Audited Financial Statements," all of the Military Retirement Fund principal statements include comparative data for FY 1998. Balances representing a 10 percent increase between fiscal years on any component of a line item are considered material and are discussed in the corresponding footnote.